



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff **Scott Smith** Chief Deputy

Traffic Crashes

The last several months have proven to be dangerous and deadly on Dodge County highways. There have been a number of contributing factors to these fatal crashes which include but are not limited to speed, alcohol/cocaine/marijuana use, inattentive driving and failure to stop at a stop sign. While it is always our goal to have zero traffic fatalities we have already seen 15 this year in Dodge County and 431 statewide.

I'd like everyone to take a moment to think about how your decisions behind the wheel can have life altering consequences for not only you, but also your passengers, other drivers and their passengers, families and friends. Additionally, every one of these crashes has a lasting impact on the first responders.

Many of the fatal crashes I have responded to have resulted in conversations with survivors. Those are some of the most difficult conversations I have had to have. I have spoken to a mother who lost her son in a rollover crash involving alcohol. I have consoled a family who lost their young son/brother after watching as emergency responders gave everything they had to try and save their loved one's life. One of my sergeants and I stayed with the siblings of a young girl who was seriously injured and later died as a result of her injuries. We stayed and consoled them until family members could come to be with them as their parents needed to go directly to the hospital to be with their daughter.

What do each of these and most fatal crashes have in common? All of them only took a couple seconds to happen and all happened as a result of a mistake. No one ever wants to think that a mistake could cost someone their life. No one ever thinks about what they could have done differently until after something bad happens. I can tell you that throughout my career after responding to a tragedy, the most common statement I hear starts with "If only I had not".

So what can we as a community do to reduce these traffic fatalities. We all know that law enforcement can't be everywhere all the times. We need those who are driving on our highways to take responsibility for their own safety. The best advice I can give is to drive defensively just as we were taught in driver's education. As a reminder, driving defensively means putting yourself in a good position to stay safe on the highway. Here are a few tips:

- Ensure proper following distance.
- Slow down and drive with care.
- Avoid aggressive driving.
- Come to a complete stop at stop signs and take extra time at stop signs to ensure the intersection is clear before proceeding.
- Don't use alcohol or drugs before driving.
- Put your phone and other distractions down. Pull over to use them.

There are hundreds of thousands of vehicles on our highways every day and we are all human and make mistakes. If we simply slow down and obey the rules of the road, it will ensure that we can keep ourselves and our loved ones safe from harm. By taking a few extra seconds to ensure our safety it will eliminate that need to say "if only I had not" after a crash that only took a second to happen. After all it should be every one's goal to make it homes safely each and every day and I want you all to be able to enjoy Dodge County, a great place to live, work and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt